

Random Encounters

Monsters of the Moon

By Eric Haddock



Moon Stalker

This encounter takes place in the village of Dark Stone. There are no statistics in particular for Dark Stone, since it is meant to be little more than a setting for this (and other) random encounters. Feel free to substitute names and other material as appropriate for your campaign.

The mooncalf is an evil malevolence that has three characteristics that make it particularly threatening: extreme intelligence, spell-like abilities, and the ability to communicate with any creature. It's a significant threat when directly encountered, which is not often. The mooncalf prefers to direct its efforts toward its grand designs, letting minions and allies do its fighting for it. Since it finds intelligent humanoids untrustworthy, it generally prefers to use other creatures to do this dirty work. It can dominate animals with its spell-like ability or find a way to convince other kinds of creatures using its intellect.



Mooncalf: hp 190; see *Monster Manual II* page 150.

This mooncalf has come to Dark Stone for a purpose. In its cold lair, it developed a lust for magic items, and it knows the best place to get them would be a group of adventurers. The mooncalf knows that adventurers are most often lured by the promise of riches. The mooncalf has none it is willing to give up, so it must use another tactic. The mooncalf also knows that adventurers are lured by sob stories of humanoids in peril. To that end, the mooncalf is going to cause a bit of mayhem using a powerful monster that will cause enough damage to lure even cynical adventurers to Dark Stone.

Dark Stone is a simple village with not more than a dozen homes and buildings. However, it does have one claim to fame: a small outdoor amphitheater. It was built a few generations ago through the largesse of a visiting bard adventurer and is now principally used for town meetings and seasonal festivals. It's rarely used for performances since the village is too small to support a strong enough community theater to take advantage of the facility. Perhaps the most frequent users are traveling bards.

This season, the townsfolk plan to decorate the amphitheater with orange and black ribbons to match the turning of the leaves and the approaching darkness of winter. Before they have a chance, the mooncalf sets loose a monster in their midst: a dune stalker that the mooncalf has recruited. The carnage the dune stalker causes is more than enough for word to spread about a monster that needs to be destroyed.

Stalking the Stalker

The adventurers may be brought into the situation by stumbling upon the village or hearing about the monster on the loose and deciding to go to Dark Stone on purpose. Either way, finding the dune stalker is not difficult -- the mooncalf wants it to be found.

Dune Stalker: hp 39; see *Monster Manual II* page 88.

When the dune stalker walks, its massive front arms drag on the ground, leaving a distinctive track that's quite unlike any other animal. For this reason, a successful Track check (DC 10) is all that's required to follow the dune stalker through the wilderness. The dune stalker is an excellent tracker itself, and thus it knows how to leave a good trail but not one so obvious that it looks purposefully laid down. However, it's still possible to spot the deception. A successful Track check (DC 28) will note that the tracks have been deliberately -- and very cleverly -- left by the dune stalker to be discovered.

The mooncalf has ordered the stalker to hole up in a cave near the village. The mooncalf's plan is to have the adventurers approach the mouth of the cave and be ambushed by the dune stalker who is hiding nearby. (The mooncalf lifted the dune stalker and placed it nearby, so the dune stalker wouldn't leave any tracks going to its hiding place.) When the battle is under way, the mooncalf plans to fly onto the scene and assault the adventurers with its magic and tentacles as appropriate. It attempts to strike the adventurers when they're outside so it can have maximum use of its *control weather* and *call lightning* abilities.

Since the mooncalf can communicate with the dune stalker telepathically, the mooncalf can help coordinate the attack. Therefore, the Dungeon Master may wish to allow the mooncalf to aid the dune

stalker with Spot and Listen checks at the beginning of the encounter if the situation calls for it (such as if the mooncalf is lurking nearby). If the attack goes poorly, the mooncalf flies away, perhaps to the dark side of the moon, leaving the dune stalker to its fate. Either way, the mooncalf has the last laugh, because the battle takes place far from its lair and dune stalkers eschew material goods. Nevertheless, if the adventurers are successful, they have helped the village of Dark Stone. The citizenry are likely to ask them to stay while they recuperate. . . .

Bringing the Parts Together

The village of Dark Stone is a simple cluster of houses that can exist easily on any campaign world. Every adventuring group passes through a village at least a little like this one and so these encounters can be tied together by having the PCs visit, and remain, in the village for other encounters, or have the encounters occur in the next place the adventurers visit.

Coming in Part 2 of Monster of the Moon

When the moon rises over Dark Stone, the villagers will realize they don't have a rat problem -- the rats have a people problem.

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